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Christian Attitudes to Nature and the Ecological Crisis

Brian Ferguson

Patrick J. Roche

Introduction

The threat to the environment from rampant industrialisation under capitalism and, until recently, marxist socialism is probably the major crisis of our time. The urgency of the problem of ecological deterioration was emphasised in a 1990 United Nations report which concluded that 'the next ten years may decide the future of the earth as a habitation for humans.'¹ Jürgen Moltmann in his major study of the ecological issue, *God in Creation*, considered that the 'environmental crisis... is so comprehensive and so irreversible that it cannot unjustly be described as apocalyptic ... the beginning of a life and death struggle for creation on this earth.'² The environmental threat has generated extensive debate about causes and solutions. For many participants the roots of the crisis are to be found in the Judaic-Christian tradition and its influence on western culture. This contemporary ecological critique of the western Christian tradition (what H. Paul Santmire has called the 'critical ecological wisdom'³) was given its most influential articulation by Lynn White in a lecture delivered to the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1966: 'to discuss religion and ecology in history is largely to discuss the Lynn White article.'⁴

Ecological critique of the Christian tradition

White's basic thesis is that 'human ecology is deeply conditioned by beliefs about our nature and destiny - that is, by religion.'⁵ The Judaic-Christian doctrine of creation (*creatio ex nihilo*) involves the understanding of the world as radically distinct from God and consequently (in contrast to pagan animism) desacralises nature. This desacralisation of nature was reinforced by the theological understanding of man (using the word generically) as made in the image of God (*imago dei*): 'man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature.'⁶ White presents this

notion of transcendence as involving 'man's effective monopoly of spirit in this world.'⁷ But this means that 'the spirits in natural objects (pagan animism)... evaporated.'⁸ The desacralisation of nature reduced the world to the status of mere 'physical fact'⁹ and 'by destroying pagan animism, Christianity made it possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects.'¹⁰ This exploitative potential was reinforced, in an activist sense, by the anthropocentric dimension ('Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen'¹¹) of the understanding of man as made in the image of God: 'Christianity in absolute contrast to ancient paganism and Asia's religions (except perhaps, Zoroastrianism) not merely established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God's will that man exploit nature for his proper ends.'¹² The '*imago dei*' doctrine is understood by White to incorporate a 'man-nature dualism' which legitimised a notion of human supremacy and a consequent utilitarian attitude to the rest of the created order - what White refers to as 'the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man.'¹³ White's argument is, in summary, that the '*creatio ex nihilo*' and '*imago dei*' doctrines radically desacralised nature and legitimised the 'idea of man's limitless rule of creation.'¹⁴

White also argued that Christianity in its western Latin form provided the intellectual matrix for the development of the means of exploitation - science and technology. White stressed the distinctively occidental character ('so certain that it seems stupid to verbalise it'¹⁵) of science and technology and considered that this development was functionally related to 'larger intellectual patterns'¹⁶ arising from the victory of Christianity over paganism - the 'greatest psychic revolution in the history of our culture.'¹⁷ But a difference in the 'tonality of piety and thought'¹⁸ meant that theological reflection and attitude in the Latin west was more congenial to the development of science and technology than in the Greek east. The eastern sacramental understanding of nature was 'essentially artistic.'¹⁹ But in the Latin west, White presents the development of natural science by the twelfth/thirteenth century as an effort to 'understand God's mind by discovering how creation

operates.'²⁰ This provided a religious motivation for scientific endeavour: 'from the thirteenth century onwards, up to and including Leibniz and Newton, every major scientist, in effect, explained his motivations in religious terms ...modern western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology.'²¹

The implication of White's general thesis is clear. The ecological threat has resulted from a dominative attitude to nature rooted in the Judaic-Christian tradition which has 'tinctured' science and technology with 'orthodox Christian arrogance towards nature.'²² This means that a solution to the ecological problem requires a fundamental religious re-orientation: 'since the roots of our troubles are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious ... we must rethink and refeel our nature and destiny.'²³ But the culpability of the Christian tradition means that the moral perspective required to re-order man's relation to nature must be found elsewhere.

The pervasive acceptance of the type of ecological critique developed by White has stimulated the contemporary quest for a new environmental ethic. This has been developed in a theologically radical fashion within, for example, the 'deep ecology' movement. The concept of 'deep ecology' is associated with the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess²⁴ and its central perspective is the understanding that there is no ontological divide (contrary to traditional Christian belief) between the human and the non-human worlds. Deep ecologists are attracted to panpsychic or pantheistic conceptions of the world. There are similarities between the cosmological perspective of 'deep ecology' and the cosmologies embodied in the mystical traditions of Zen Buddhism and Taoism or the 'new physics' suggested by, for example, David Bohm and Fitjof Capra²⁵. These cosmological perspectives incorporate a 'seamless web' view of the structure of reality that is firmly coupled to what Naess has called 'biospherical egalitarianism'²⁶ - that is, the idea that all members of the biosphere are of equal and intrinsic worth.

'Deep ecology' is a holistic and non-anthropocentric understanding that regards human beings as just one element among others in the web of life and rejects the ascription of only instrumental value to the non-human world. The movement represents a major trend in contemporary environmental thought. Its influence is, for example, apparent in the concept of Gaia associated with the work of the British scientist James Lovelock, author of *Gaia: A New look at life on Earth*. Gaia - from the name the ancient Greeks gave to their goddess of the earth - was the term used by Lovelock to refer to the biosphere which he regarded as a single self-regulating organism. The Gaia hypothesis views human life as just one dispensable life form within the total biotic community and has been very influential in the attempt to formulate the kind of metaphysical structure that a new environmental ethic is felt by many to require.²⁷

The essential thrust of the contemporary ecological critique of Christianity is, as classically stated by White, that the Christian tradition teaches a despotic and utilitarian attitude which is significantly to blame (if not the main cause) for the exploitative and destructive approach to nature that has resulted in the ecological crisis of today. This is obviously a critique which cannot be ignored by adherents of the Christian tradition. An adequate Christian response would not merely require exculpation but a positive demonstration of the relevance of traditional Christian belief as a moral guide for the resolution of the ecological threat. The failure to adequately respond would contribute to the further marginalisation of the Christian perspective by a proliferation of theologically exotic and religiously regressive world-views. The task for adherents of traditional belief is to show that the biblical understanding of creation and man's relationship to it has been inadequately grasped (if not misrepresented) by its critics and that the resources of Scripture and the Judaic-Christian tradition are sufficient for the development of a contemporary ecological ethic.

Creation

White is correct to stress that in contrast to 'Graeco-Roman mythology' and the 'intellectuals of the ancient West' Christianity

'inherited from Judaism not only a concept of time as nonrepetitive and linear but also a striking story of creation.'²⁸ In contrast to other views on the relationship of God to the world, as where God is understood to create out of pre-existing material (*ex materia*, as in dualism) or divine substance (*ex deo*, as in pantheistic monism), the classical Judaic-Christian doctrine of creation affirms that the world has been created by God out of nothing (*ex nihilo*). Judaic-Christian theology confesses God to be the transcendent and sovereign Lord of all existence: 'the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof' (Psalm 24). Biblical terminology does not have the connotation of the Latin or Greek uses of the word 'nature'. The Latin '*natura*' and the Greek '*phusis*' suggest, as emphasised by Berkhoff, something 'centred in itself, with an immanent origin and growth; dependence on the creator God cannot be expressed by them.'²⁹ A.R. Peacocke has drawn attention to the fact that the New Testament uses the word 'creation' (Rom.8:19f; Col.1:15; 2 Peter 3:4) which connotes dependence and it is this presupposition that also pervades the Old Testament even though the word 'creation' is not actually employed - the Old Testament uses other expressions such as 'heaven and earth'; 'all that lives'; and 'the earth' (Gen.1:1; Ps.145:16; Ps. 24:1).³⁰ The natural world, in biblical understanding, is never an independent or self-subsistent entity; it is always the creation of God.

T.S. Derr in *Ecology and Human Need* has stressed that the doctrine of creation does indeed (as emphasised by White) involve the 'de-divinisation' (to use the current jargon) of nature: 'to say that nature is the creation of a God who is himself non-nature is to say that nature is quite other than God, that it is not simply the external aspect of divine reality.'³¹ Lawrence Osborn in *Stewards of Creation* interprets Genesis 1:2 as demoting the primordial chaos from its status of matrix of the gods to that of created raw material for the categories of existence. He also understands God's blessing of creation as a denial of the divinity of nature; fertility is not a capacity of an autonomous nature but remains the gift of God the creator.³² J.A. Baker, in his discussion of attitudes to nature, suggests that this biblical demythologising of the material world involved the erosion of 'numinous dread' of nature and the

emergence of an understanding of the world as something which in principle should manifest the order and rationality of the creator³³ and thus be open to investigation and use. But this does not mean that the doctrine of creation involves a merely utilitarian valuation of nature in relation to human objectives. The Biblical doctrine of creation (as traditionally understood) implies that nature is not divine and is not to be worshipped - such worship is idolatry - but the world nevertheless has a value which is derivative from the fact of creation and not just because of its usefulness to humans: 'the Judaic-Christian tradition affirms, in the case of both man and nature, a derived dignity, and accords each a respect commensurate with its source in God ... it is the relationship in which creation stands to its Creator which confers upon its value.'³⁴

The understanding that the world has a significance derivative from the fact of creation is at the very least implicit in biblical passages which emphasise the 'goodness' of the created order and its sacramental and aesthetic character. The formula, 'and God saw that it was good,' repeated throughout the first chapter of Genesis conveys a sense of divine satisfaction that permeates the creation narrative: 'the formula marks out each work as one corresponding to the divine intention, perfect as far as its nature is required and permitted, complete, and the object of the Creator's approving regard and satisfaction.'³⁵ This affirmation, in the first chapter of Genesis, of the 'goodness' of the world is echoed throughout the Scriptures in numerous passages which convey what J.A. Baker has described as 'an affectionate and admiring approach'³⁶ to nature - passages that celebrate the beauty of creation (Gen.2:9; Job 38-41; Eccl 3:11) or express an understanding of the world as (to quote Calvin's classic statement) the 'theatre of God's glory' (Ps. 19:1; Is.6:3). The suggestion of a significance independent of human purpose is reinforced by biblical teaching on God's immanence, in the sense of providential activity, within the world - and in particular by passages which speak of the way in which the Creator delights in his good creation and continues to actively care for it, even down to the most seemingly insignificant creature (Job 38-41; Ps.104; Matt. 6: 28-30; 10:29). The implication of this teaching is that the understanding of the world as 'good' (where the Hebrew

'*tob*' draws attention to an object's quality and fitness for its purpose) is not exhausted by an anthropocentric utilitarianism: 'nature is not to be evaluated simply in terms of man's needs and interests; and to think that it is, is a mark of folly... God created the greater part of the world for its own sake, and wisdom consists in recognising this and the limitations which this imposes on us.'³⁸

Dominion

But how, then, is biblical teaching concerning man's dominion over nature to be understood? Modern biblical scholarship has recovered what T.S. Derr has called the 'earthiness'³⁸ of the biblical view. Man in biblical perspective is an integral part of nature - a biological being. Nowhere is this more explicitly stated than when man is said to be created from the 'dust of the earth' (Genesis 2:7) or, following the curse (Genesis 3:17) that at death he would return to the dust (Genesis 3:19). But the creation narratives also present man as placed in a unique relation to God and to the non-human world. Man was made in the 'image of God' (Genesis 1: 26-27). The precise meaning of this phrase³⁹ has been extensively debated but, however the image concept is interpreted, it is the basis of the 'dominion' (Genesis 1:28) that is entrusted to man over the earth and the other creatures. The question of how this 'dominion' given to man is to be understood is central to the debate over Christian attitudes to nature. Critics of the Judaic-Christian tradition associate dominion with ruthless exploitation. The ecologist Ian McHarg refers to Genesis 1: 26-28 as 'three horrifying lines' and a 'text of compound horror' which has cultivated and legitimised an exploitative and destructive attitude to nature: 'if you want to find one text .. which will guarantee that the relationship of man to nature can only be destructive ... which can explain all of the destruction and all of the despoilation accomplished by western man for at least 2,000 years, then you do not have to look any further than this ghastly calamitous text.'⁴⁰

The key terms used in the text to which McHarg refers are 'have dominion' or 'rule' (Heb., *רָדָה* , Gen.1:26,28) and 'subdue'

(Heb., **כָּבַשׁ**, Gen.1:28). But James Barr has pointed out that while 'have dominion' may be used in a strong physical sense (in fact only in Joel 3:13) it was most often used merely for ruling in general - even expressing peaceful ruling as in the reference to Solomon in 1 Kings 4:24.⁴¹ The word is not at all necessarily a strong one. The word 'subdue' (Genesis 1:28) is, however, suggestive of violent physical movement like trampling down. But Barr notes that the word is used in Genesis 1:28 only with reference to the earth ('fill the earth and subdue it') and not to animals - he doubts whether more is intended than what is required for the basic needs of settlement and agriculture corresponding to the 'working' (Genesis 2:5) and 'tilling' (Genesis 2:15) of the ground.⁴² John Black in *The Dominion of Man* makes the same point with respect to Genesis 2:15 ('and the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it') - Black interprets 'dress' as meaning to 'till' or to 'manage' for both pleasure and use and he interprets 'keep' as 'protect'.⁴³ Thus Black concludes that in the Hebrew view one of the reasons for man's presence on earth was that he should look after it on God's behalf and preserve it not only as a source of food but also for pleasure. The same understanding is expressed by Jürgen Moltmann in *God and Creation*: 'human mastery over the earth is intended to resemble the cultivating and protective work of a gardener... nothing is said about predatory exploitation.'⁴⁴

These considerations clearly do not justify the view that the Scriptures (and in particular the Genesis creation narratives) teach an adversarial view of mankind's relation to the environment. On the contrary, there is considerable consensus among commentators that the Biblical notion of 'dominion' can best be understood in terms of the concept of kingship in antiquity. Barr suggests that Genesis 1 presents a paradise picture - similar to that which Isaiah 11 refers to a future time - of harmony in the animal world and peace between man and animal. But within this context the depiction of man's 'dominion' contains no 'markedly exploitive aspect ... it approximates to the well known oriental idea of the shepherd king'⁴⁵ - an ancient idea of kingship which has been explicated by C.Westerman:

As lord of his realm, the king is responsible not only for the realm; he is the one who bears and mediates blessings for the realm entrusted to him. Man would fail in his royal office of dominion over the earth were he to exploit the earth's resources to the detriment of the land, plant life, animals, rivers and seas ... What is decisive is the responsibility of man for the preservation of what has been entrusted to him; and he can show this responsibility by exercising his royal office of mediator of prosperity and well-being, like the kings of the ancient world.⁴⁶

Peacocke has added force to this understanding of dominion by stressing that man's relation to the non-human world must be understood as a caring dominion exercised under the authority of the Creator. The meaning of the Genesis presentation of man in relation to the environment may be understood in terms of man as a viceregent, steward, manager or trustee so that kingship is not an unconstrained metaphor: 'man is called to tend the earth and its creatures in responsibility to its Creator.'⁴⁷ Black has pointed out that a sense of responsibility and accountability of man to God for the management of the earth is found in both the Old and New Testaments (the Genesis account of creation stresses man's role as God's steward of the earth as do Jesus' parables of stewardship in Matt. 21: 33-41; Matt. 24: 48-51; Matt. 25: 14-28) and is a central insight of the Judaic-Christian tradition and consequently of the western intellectual heritage.⁴⁸

But the notion of dominion also involves the understanding of man as a co-creator with God. Unlike God who creates out of nothing, man creates or works only within the framework and limits of the natural order as given by God. Man must therefore honour the integrity of that order: 'responsible human creativity takes into account the balances and harmonies of the natural world.'⁴⁹ Hence, for example, the Old Testament laws that set limitations on the way the land is to be used in agriculture (Exodus 23:10; Leviticus 19:23-25) and the treatment of domestic animals to prevent exploitation (Exodus 20: 8-11; 23:12; Deuteronomy 25:4). In this secondary role in creation, humility is appropriate to man - a

humility underscored by his accountability to the Creator. D. J. Hall has commented that while the earth is clearly the Lord's (Psalm 24), there is also a sense in which it is given to man - but with 'strings attached'⁵⁰. The conditions of the gift are 'man's responsible treatment of the earth, and his gratitude to the Giver'⁵¹ - a gratitude which in the biblical sense is the exact antithesis of the attitude that sees nature as something to be mastered and exploited for human ends.

The dominion which the Genesis narratives confer on man is not a license for the unbridled exploitation and subjugation of nature that critics have claimed. Biblical domination has nothing to do with the ruthless exercise of power, nor has it anything in common with the plunder of nature on the basis that nature exists merely to satisfy human need. Exponents of the 'critical ecological wisdom' who interpret the biblical perspective in these terms are (as D.J. Hall has forcefully pointed out) 'at the level of biblical exegesis... quite innocent of any real sophistication of thought.'⁵⁷

Fall

The ecological critique of the Judaic-Christian tradition is based on an exegetically defective hermeneutic of the biblical notion of human dominion. The relevance of Scripture to an understanding of the ecological crisis derives rather from the biblical anthropology of man as a fallen being: 'man does have a position of control over nature which is approved by God but the tyrannical use of this position is a failure deriving from human sin not from God's intention in creation.'⁵³ Classical Christian theology has identified sin in the biblical tradition as essentially involving disobedience. The fall is understood in terms of man's arrogant desire for autonomy and rebellion against the authority and benevolence of the Creator. The havoc caused by this attempted reversal of status has traditionally been understood as affecting not only man's spiritual relationship with God and his personal and social relationships but also his relationship with the natural environment. D. J. Hall has rightly drawn attention to the fact that the effect of sin on the natural order has been obscured in Christian

theology by an emphasis on sin's primary aspect as man's rebellion against the Creator⁵⁴. But the ecological crisis of our time has occasioned a hermeneutical focus on the original biblical insight that sin has disrupted man's relationship with nature: 'the disobedience of Adam consisted in his rejection of the divine boundaries placed upon his dominion of the earth. It was thus a rebellion against the good order of creation established by God in Genesis 1.'⁵⁵

Renewal

But the understanding that creation is affected by the fall raises the question of the extent to which the world of nature is included in the consummation of God's purposes in salvation. On this issue the biblical/classical theological tradition has been understood to be ambivalent. H. Paul Santmire has pointed out in *The Travail of Nature* that there exists in the tradition a view of salvation which extends to the natural order alongside and in tension with a purely spiritual understanding of redemption. Santmire considers that, in particular, the gospel of John and the book of Hebrews present a vision of a final fulfilment which is totally spiritual in contrast to the 'earth-affirming' character of the majority of Old and New Testament writings.⁵⁶ However K. Innes has suggested that the emphasis in these two books may be accounted for by their distinctive perspectives - they are concerned with deliverance through Christ from the sin and imperfection of the present age rather than the future of the earth as such.⁵⁷ The role of nature in God's salvific purpose is also discounted by the belief that the present order of creation is destined not for renewal but for complete destruction to be replaced by a totally new creation. This belief is sometimes justified on the basis of 2 Peter 3: 10-13 interpreted as teaching that the new heaven and earth will be preceded by a cosmic dissolution of the existing order. This interpretation is disputed. For example, R. J. Bauckham suggests that this and other similar passages 'emphasise the radical discontinuity between the old and the new, but it is nevertheless clear that they intend to describe a renewal and not an abolition of creation.'⁵⁸ The weight of biblical evidence seems to point to the

view that redemption - the redemption secured by Christ - is to be understood not only in personal, human terms but as also including the renewal of the whole creation as the final goal: 'redemption in the continuity of the two Testaments ... assumes the redemption (*Shalom*) of the whole creation.'⁵⁹

There are a number of passages in the Old Testament which anticipate a renewal of creation. Psalm 96: 11-13 and 98:1-9 speak of the joy of all created things at the coming of the Lord to judge. Isaiah 11:1-9 pictures the future messianic age in terms reminiscent of the Garden of Eden - a world where predatory relationships among animals are transformed and where man and animals live in peace and harmony. The promise of 'new heavens and a new earth' is first found in the Scriptures in Isaiah 65:17-25 and 66:22. Texts such as these hold out the promise of a future for a redeemed material creation. The same vision is developed further in the New Testament. Jesus speaks, in Matthew 19: 28, of the 'regeneration' or 'renewal' of the world in terms that 'effectively conveys the Jewish eschatological hope of new heavens and a new earth in the messianic age.'⁶⁰ The apostle Peter speaks in similar terms in Acts 3:21 where he refers to the 'restitution of all things'. Ephesians 1:10 and Colossians 1:20 are key texts on the theme of the renewal of nature. Paul's thought in these passages is shaped by the cosmic significance of Christ's work - the apostle looks forward to the day of final renewal when 'all things', including the world of nature, will be brought under the lordship of Christ. The biblical vision of a renewed creation in a new heaven and a new earth reaches a climax in the final chapters of the book of Revelation and in particular with God's majestic declaration: 'Behold, I make all things new' (Revelation 21:5).

A particularly important passage in relation to this whole question of the renewal of nature is Romans 8: 19-22. The point of note here is that although 'creation' has been subjected to 'frustration' and 'futility' as a result of human disobedience, Paul also emphasizes that hope is not excluded from creation. On the contrary, it was subjected 'in hope'. The present disjointedness of creation is a 'groaning in travail', birth pangs that will ultimately

give way to joy and fulfilment. The natural order is waiting in eager expectation for a consummation which will bring an end to its 'bondage to decay'. It seems clear that Paul here sees Christ's redemptive activity as effecting not just the reconciliation of humanity with God but through that also the restoration of the entire created order. The non-human part of creation is not merely a dispensable backdrop to the human drama of salvation history but is itself able to share in the 'glorious liberty' which Paul envisages for redeemed mankind. This interpretation of the passage does not necessarily mean that nature has to be understood as being fallen in itself. It may be understood simply in the sense that nature's fulfilment is inextricably bound up with the destiny of man. Thus C. E. B. Cranfield who takes this view writes that creation is cheated of its true fulfilment so long as man, the chief actor in the great drama of God's praise, fails to contribute his rational part.⁶¹ The ecological implications of this biblical promise of the renewal of nature are well stated by Cranfield in his discussion of Romans 8:19-21 and creation's subjection 'in hope' and its destined liberation:

this clearly has an important bearing on the Christian's relation to the sub-human creation and — more generally — on the whole subject of 'the environment' about which there is now such widely felt concern. It is of course true that the debt of love which we owe our fellow man includes the obligation not to spoil or destroy their environment but to cherish it for their sake. We have an obligation to the sub-human creation for man's sake, for the sake of our living fellow men and also for the sake of those not yet born. Of this truth we must not for a moment lose sight. But these verses indicate that this truth is by no means the whole truth of the matter and that to value the sub-human creation solely as man's habitat, man's environment, man's amenities — even if we do think of 'man's' as meaning 'our neighbour', rather than 'our own' — is to be guilty of idolatry. If the sub-human creation is part of God's creation, if to it also he is faithful, and if he is going to bring it also (as well as believing men) to a goal which is worthy of himself, then it too has a dignity of its own and an inalienable, since divinely-appointed, right to be treated by us with reverence and sensitiveness. And our

duty to it is not only a part of our duty to love our neighbour as ourselves, but also an integral part of our duty to love God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength. Since God has not created the sub-human creation solely for man's use and comfort but also with the intention of bringing it in the end to that liberty of which verse 21 speaks, true love to him must involve not only loving our fellow man as ourselves but also treating with respect and with a proper sense of responsibility his humbler creation, whether animate or inanimate.'⁶²

From all this it seems clear that the fate of nature is inseparably bound up with the fate of humanity. Since the whole of creation is affected then the whole creation will also be reclaimed in Christ - as Peter Gregorios has remarked, 'humanity is redeemed with the created order, not from it.'⁶³ In connection with this Moltmann has observed that the new creation in the New Testament corresponds to the original creation in the Old, but as a mirror image to it. Creation in the beginning, the 'protological' creation starts with nature and ends with human beings, the 'eschatological' creation reverses the order and starts with the liberation of human beings and ends with the redemption of nature: 'human beings and nature have their own destinies on their own particular levels but in their enslavement and their liberty they share a common destiny.'⁶⁴

Conclusion

This exploration of biblical themes on man and nature clearly justifies the conclusion that in Scripture nature is not understood merely as a resource that man has a right to exploit ruthlessly for his own ends. Contrary to the 'critical ecological wisdom', classically represented by Lynn White, such an attitude is, as Attfield has observed, 'foreign to the Christianity of the Bible.'⁶⁵ Peacocke has correctly stressed that biblical ideas of nature and man's relationship to his environment 'provide a strong motivation, to those who hold them, towards action based on desirable ecological values.'⁶⁶ This is due to the fact that the biblical understanding of

creation, dominion, fall and renewal means that the 'dignity of nature is honoured all round the circle of Christian teaching.'⁶⁷

Notes

1. Quoted by Jonathan Dimbleby, *World leaders Debate*, BBC 2, 22 May 1990.
2. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, London, SCM, 1985, p.xi.
3. H. Paul Santmire, *The Travail of Nature*, Philadelphia, Fortress, 1985, p.11.
4. D. Spring and E. Spring (eds), *Ecology and Religion in History*, London, Harper and Row, 1974, p.3.
5. Lynn White, 'The historic roots of our ecologic crisis', *Science*, Vol.155, No.3767, 10 March 1967, p.1206.
6. Ibid, p.1205
7. Ibid, p.1205
8. Ibid, p.1205
9. Ibid, p.1205
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11. Ibid, p.1205
12. Ibid, p.1205
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18. Ibid, p.1206
19. Ibid, p.1206
20. Ibid, p.1206
21. Ibid, p.1206
22. Ibid, p.1207
23. Ibid, p.1206
24. See for example, Arne Naess 'The deep ecology movement: some philosophical aspects', *Philosophical Enquiry*, No. 8, 1986 and 'A defense of the deep ecology movement,' *Environmental Ethics* Vol. 6, No.3, 1984 See also B. Devall and G. Sessions, *Deep Ecology*, Salt Lake City, Peregrine Smith, 1985.

25. See, David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980. See also Fitjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics*, London, Fontana, 1976.
26. Arne Naess, 'The deep ecology movement: some philosophical aspects', *Philosophical Enquiry*, No.8, 1986, p.16.
27. See, for example, R. Elliott and A. Gare, (eds), *Environmental Philosophy*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1983.
28. Lynn White, op.cit., p.1206
29. H. Berkhof, 'God in nature and history,' *Faith and Order Studies*, 1964-67, Paper No.50, World Council of Churches, Geneva, p.14.
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Faith-healing and Death

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Death - friend or foe?

It is surely true to say that the most frequent and pressing reason for which the help of the faith-healer is sought is either the fact or the fear of incurable illness which threatens, or is thought to threaten, early death. It is certainly true to say that many who seek the help of the faith-healer in such circumstances would not do so, and would not feel the need to do so, under any other circumstances. This raises serious problems both for the healer and for the sufferer.

Now, of course, none of us wants to die, whether we are Christians or not. Even the great Apostle was 'in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless, to abide in the flesh is more needful for you'. (Phil.1:23,24). Who wants to die? What parent wants to leave behind a family, or what child wants to lose a parent? On the level of human relationships — kinship, neighbourhood, friendship — and their emotional involvements, the answer is, of course, none.

As C. S. Lewis puts it,
There are two attitudes towards Death which the human mind naturally adopts. . . On the one hand Death is the triumph of Satan, the punishment of the Fall, and the last enemy. Christ shed tears at the grave of Lazarus and sweated blood in Gethsemane: the Life of Lives that was in Him detested this penal obscenity not less than we do, but more. On the other hand, only he who loses his life will save it. We are baptised into the death of Christ, and it is the remedy for the Fall. Death is, in fact, what some modern people call 'ambivalent'. It is Satan's great weapon and also God's great weapon: it is holy and unholy; our supreme disgrace and our only hope; the thing Christ came to conquer and the means by which He conquered. ¹

As Christians we profess to believe with Paul that 'to depart and be with Christ is far better' (Phil.1:23). R. P. Martin comments thus,

Any idea of an unconscious state following death or of a purgatorial discipline in the next world is denied by the sheer simplicity of Paul's expectation. Many things about the future beyond the grave are veiled from us; but what has been revealed (Dt.29:29) is all we want to know. 'So shall we ever be with the Lord' (1 Thess.4:17; cf. 1 Thess.5:10).²

(i) The 'reformed' teaching

The teaching of the Reformed Churches in regard to death and what lies beyond may be represented by the statements of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* thus,

I. The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption (Gen.3.19; Acts 13:36); but their souls, (which neither die nor sleep,) having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them (Lk.23:43; Eccles.12:7). The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies (Heb.12:23; 2 Cor.5:1,6,8; Phil.1:23; Acts 3:21; Eph.4:10); and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day (Lk.16:23,24; Acts 1:25; Jude 6,7; 1 Pet.3:19). Besides these two places for souls separated from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none.

II. At the last day such as are found alive shall not die, but be changed (1 Thess.4:17; 1 Cor.15:51,52): and all the dead shall be raised up with the selfsame bodies, and none other, although with different qualities, which shall be united again to their souls for ever (Job 19:26,27; 1 Cor.15.42-44).

III. The bodies of the unjust shall, by the power of Christ, be raised to dishonour; the bodies of the just, by his Spirit, unto honour, and be made conformable to his own glorious body (Acts 24:15; Jn. 5:28,29; 1 Cor.15:43; Phil.3:21).³

In his Commentary on the Confession A. A. Hodge says, We know that when the soul leaves it the body is resolved into its original chemical elements, which are gradually incorporated with the shifting currents of matter in the surface of the Earth. The Scriptures teach us, however, that, in spite of this flux of their material constituents, the real identity of our bodies is preserved; and that, as members of Christ, all that is essential to them will be ultimately preserved and brought to a glorious resurrection. . . During the interval between the death of each individual and the general resurrection. . . The souls of both believers and the reprobate continue after death conscious and active, although they remain until the resurrection separate from their bodies. . . the souls of believers are made perfect in holiness. . . (and) are immediately introduced into the presence of Christ, and continue to enjoy bright revelations of God and the society of the holy angels. . . The souls of the reprobate are at once introduced into the place provided for the devil and his angels, and continue in unutterable misery.. ⁴ pp.381ff.

(ii) The teaching of 'Adventism'

Seventh-day Adventism, however, takes a different view. Commenting on Phil.1:23 *Questions on Doctrine* (the Statement of Doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church) says,

Of course it will be better to be with Christ. But why, it must be asked, should we conclude from this remark that the apostle expects, immediately upon death, to go at once into the presence of Christ? The Bible does not say so. It merely states his desire to depart, and to be with Christ. ⁵

Nor does Adventism believe in the separation of soul and body.

It should be observed that Paul does not tell us that it is his soul or his spirit that will depart. He merely says (in 2 Tim.4:6) 'I' have a desire; the time of 'my' departure is at hand. . . When the time of leaving comes, he departs, and the whole person goes there is no separation of body and soul. . . There is a time when Paul could go to be with his Lord as a whole man — body, soul, and spirit — and that is at the time of the coming of the Lord. This he stresses in 1 Thess.5:23. ⁶

Moreover, in commenting on 2 Cor.5:8 Adventism insists that there is no reason for concluding that being 'present with the Lord' need be immediately consequent upon being 'absent from the body'. Thus,

It must be recognised that there is nothing in this text to justify our coming to the conclusion that being 'present with the Lord' will occur immediately upon being 'absent from the body'.⁷

In fact, Adventism believes that the fulfilment of the hope of the Christian lies not at death but at the resurrection.

Rewards are given to the saints, not at death but at the second advent. The resurrection of the righteous takes place at the time of our Saviour's return from heaven to gather His people (Mt.16:27; Is.40:10; 2 Tim.4:8; etc.). . . At death the saints go to the grave. They will live again, but they come to life and live with Jesus after they are raised from the dead. While asleep in the tomb the child of God knows nothing. Time matters not to him. If he should be there a thousand years, the time would be to him as but a moment. One who serves God closes his eyes in death, and whether one day or a thousand years elapse, the next instant in his consciousness will be when he opens his eyes and beholds his blessed Lord. To him it is death — then sudden glory.⁸

Speaking of those who in the Scriptures were raised from the dead — the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Kings 17), the Shunamite's son (2 Kings 4), the widow of Nain's son (Luke 7), the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8), Tabitha (Acts 9), Eutychus (Acts 20), Lazarus (John 11) — Adventism says,

If the soul goes to either heaven or hell at death, surely those who have been resurrected would talk of the glories of the heavenly land, or they would warn sinners in no uncertain tones of the torments of the damned. Yet there is no record of their having said a single word. How strange, if the soul or spirit survives death as a conscious entity, that we have no word at all from any of the aforementioned individuals

concerning what happened during the period they were dead!⁹

But, however it is perceived, to be 'absent from the body' and 'present with the Lord' must, for the believer, mean 'to die is gain'.

(iii) To be or not to be

Moreover, when others die we turn for our comfort and consolation to the words of Christ, 'I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am ye may be also' (Jn. 14:2,3).

If, then, all this is really true, surely death is not the worst thing that can happen to those who are Christ's, but rather the best. Why should the answer to terminal illness be a search for faith-healing (and if one attempt fails, another, and another!) in order to avoid death? And why should anyone in the name of Jesus Christ think that he is offering 'hope' or 'consolation' by promising or attempting to prolong the sin and strife of life in this 'present evil world' as an alternative to the glory and joy of being 'with Christ'?

But, it may be said, 'Why then should the Christian believer seek healing at any time or in any form — even through the doctor or the normal medical means?' The answer is clear. It is, according to Scripture, our duty to preserve life by all normal and natural means. The command, 'Thou shalt not kill' teaches this, as the Shorter Catechism points out, 'The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others'.¹⁰ It is for this reason we believe that murder, suicide, abortion (except for the preservation of the life of the mother) or euthanasia, whether with the consent of the person concerned or not, are contrary to God's Word and therefore unacceptable to the Christian conscience. It is our duty to preserve our own or our neighbour's life by all normal means and not to endanger it either by harmful or injurious activity on the one hand, or by neglect on the other.

In the matter of faith-healing, however, we are discussing not the normal preservation of life, but the abnormal prolongation of it when all the normal resources have failed or are thought to be unavailing. Nor are we suggesting that there need be anything wrong with seeking divine help in such circumstances provided it is on the Scriptural basis of 'not my will but thine be done', as our Lord himself prayed in those very circumstances. What we believe to be in question is the view that death is the worst enemy of the believer and to be evaded so long as possible by the exercise of faith-healing when all other means have failed, for this undoubtedly is the frame of mind in which much of the appeal to faith-healers is made. The position of the Christian believer must surely be that of the Apostle Paul, 'To me to live is Christ and to die is gain' (Phil.1:21), and for the very good reason that 'with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death' (Phil.1:20).

What then are we to believe concerning death? And what has it to do with regard to the issue of faith-healing?

Cause of death

The life of an individual in this world comes to an end, according to the Scriptures, either by physical death or by translation into the presence of God at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. 'It is appointed unto men once to die' (Heb.9:27). Or again, 'Then we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall be caught up together with them (the resurrected saints) in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Thess.4:17). Since time began there have been only two exceptions spoken of in the Scriptures. Enoch was translated into the presence of God without death, and the prophet Elijah was transported to heaven without dying (Gen.5:21ff.; 2 Kings 2: 5-13). Death, therefore, is to be expected as the normal termination of life in this world.

It is the inevitable end of that process of 'change and decay' which is characteristic of all God's creation. As the wise widow-woman said to king David in an attempt to prevent further bloodshed in his violent land, 'We must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither

doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him' (2 Sam.14:14). Even the normal span of life is declared to be 'three score years and ten' (Ps.90:10). But, of course, under the sovereign providences of God it may be longer or shorter, and the end may be directly effected by natural decline of strength, by accident, crime, famine, war, by self-inflicted injury or suicide, or by the process of physical disease. It can, of course, come about in different ways or circumstances, for example, with instant and unexpected suddenness; as the result of a long and distressing process of increasing pain or weakness; or as the peaceful climax of a gradual and contented approach to the fulfilment of the earthly mission and the realisation of the heavenly reward.

However it comes, it comes, by God's decree, as a biological necessity. But, in the Scriptures, it comes also as the result of the fall of mankind from that state in which our first parents were created 'in the likeness and image' of God, and from which they, and we as their natural progeny, were estranged by their submission to the will and power of Satan, and consequent separation from God in judgment. Thus, in Christian and Biblical perspective, death is not merely a physical phenomenon but rather the physical result of the spiritual breakdown through sin of mankind's original relationship with God. Hence the Apostle could say, 'the wages of sin is death' (Rom.6:23). Death is the penalty for sin which affects the whole human race, 'as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin, so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned' (Rom.5:12). As C. S. Lewis puts it,

Spirit and Nature have quarrelled in us; that is our disease. Nothing we can yet do enables us to imagine its complete healing. Some glimpses and faint hints we have: in the Sacraments, in the use made of sensuous imagery by the great poets, in the best instances of sexual love, in our experiences of the earth's beauty. But the full healing is utterly beyond our present conceptions. ¹¹

Thus, from the physical point of view, death is seen by most people in purely negative and pessimistic perspectives. It represents the dissolution of life in terms of physical strength, and its

resources of energy, vision, wisdom, concentration and perseverance; the disruption, if not the end, of the closest and most sacred relationships both of kinship and friendship; the destruction of skills, dreams and purposes without which the world becomes an even darker, poorer and more hopeless place. Death is so final. There is no filling of the vacant place it leaves. There is no hearing again the voice that is stilled. There is no undoing of the things which caused estrangement or pain. There is no bridging of the gulf that divides eternal darkness from eternal joy. Of all the enemies of mankind's peace and prosperity that Christ had to face and conquer, surely indeed death was the last and greatest. Speaking of the ultimate triumph of the Lord when 'He shall have put down all rule and authority and power' of the Evil One, Paul says, 'For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death' (1 Cor.15:25,26). So death is the great enemy of our peace and hope.

No wonder, then, that death is to be feared and avoided or postponed if possible. No wonder life is so sweet and to be preserved or held on to almost at any cost in terms of frailty, pain or need. That is a perfectly understandable position for the atheist or the heathen worshipper to be in. But not for the Christian believer.

The hope of life

But it is the very epitome of the glory and victory of the Christian faith that 'death is swallowed up in victory' (1 Cor.15:54-57). The sting of death has been drawn. The apparent victory of the grave has been reversed. Alford in reference to 1 Cor.15:25,26 puts it thus,

Death is 'the last enemy', as being the consequence of sin: when he is overcome and done away with, the whole end of Redemption is shown to have been accomplished.¹²

The consequences of sin in terms of God's judgment have been put away already for the believer, but when Christ comes to reign the very experience of death itself will be no more. In that sense the last enemy will itself have been finally destroyed. As the Seer of Patmos saw in his vision 'death and hell were cast into the

lake of fire. This is the second death' (Rev.21:14). Leon Morris expresses it this way,

Paul's thought is that Christ will at the last have full and complete authority over all things and all men, and that He will then 'deliver up' this authority, this rule, to His Father. When Christ comes back it will be to reign in majesty (cf. 2 Thess.1:7ff). All that opposes God will then be subdued. . . Death will be robbed of all its power. At present no man can resist the touch of death. Then death will be able to touch no man. 13

The bodily death and resurrection of Christ is both the means and the ground of the believer's confidence, and the guarantee of the Christian's hope and assurance for, 'as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive' (1 Cor.15:22). With the Psalmist the believer can sing 'Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever' (Ps.23:4,6). And with the Apostle the believer can affirm 'We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens' (2 Cor.5:1). This in face of the fact that in our earthly condition, 'we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven' (2 Cor.5:2).

Tasker sees Paul's refusal to be dismayed by the growing consciousness of his failing faculties and the increasing awareness that his sufferings will ultimately result in his death, as the result of his conviction that

His human body, as he is becoming more and more conscious, is a temporary structure, adequate to shelter him during the few brief years of his earthly pilgrimage, but as vulnerable to the winds of circumstance and the wear and tear of everyday life as a 'tabernacle' or tent. But, he is convinced ('we know') that the shelter that awaits him after death is as superior to that provided by the present body as the protection of a solid well-built house is superior to that of a tent. That better shelter already exists. . . It was this 'eternal' shelter,

described as 'mansions' or dwelling-places that Jesus told His disciples He was going on ahead to make ready for them.¹⁴

But it has been suggested that Paul's use of the double compound verb ἐπενδύομαι (translated as 'Clothed upon with') may mean

that Paul longed to have this resurrection body put on over his present body as an additional vesture. In other words, he wanted to be alive when the Lord returned, so that his earthly body could be changed into a spiritual body without the dissolution of death.¹⁵

But, as Tasker submits, it is more likely that Paul's intention is that his sufferings

are accompanied by groanings because he longs for the more permanent, heavenly (the meaning of 'from heaven') shelter which awaits him after death.¹⁶

But not only does the Christian believer possess that assurance of life beyond the grave, but also the prospect of a new quality of life to match the glory and perfection of that land which is 'fairer than day'. The resurrected body in heaven will be perfectly restored and, like the body of Christ, the Church, will be 'without spot or wrinkle' (Eph.5:27). Is not this the implication of Paul's words, 'It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body' (1 Cor.15:42-44). Alford says of Paul's phrase 'in weakness' (ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ),

Chrysostom understands ἀσθένεια. of its 'inability to resist corruption': De Wette would refer it to the previous state of pain and disease; but it seems better to understand it of the 'powerlessness' of the corpse, contrasted with ἐν δυνάμει 'in vigour', viz. the fresh and eternal energy of the new body free from disease and pain.¹⁷

The need for such a metamorphosis is expressed thus by Leon Morris,

. . . the body we now have is a body suited for the present life. It is adapted to the *psuche*, the rational principle of life. But such a body is ill-adapted for life in the world to come. For that a body is needed which is attuned to the spirit, in fact, 'a spiritual body'. This does not necessarily mean 'composed of spirit', but rather 'which expresses spirit', 'which answers to the needs of spirit'.¹⁸

In the same vein John in his vision of life in the eternal city says, 'God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away' (Rev.21:4). And in his vision of the consequences of the return of Christ in glory Paul is able to say that He shall 'change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself' (Phil.3:21). Here the 'vile body' is taken by Lightfoot to mean, 'the body which we bear in our present low estate, which is exposed to all the passions, sufferings, and indignities of this life.'¹⁹

The JFB Commentary notes,

Our spiritual resurrection now is the pledge of our bodily resurrection to glory hereafter (vs.20; Rom.8:11). As Christ's glorified body was essentially identical with His body of humiliation; so our resurrection bodies as believers, since they shall be like His, shall be identical essentially with our present bodies, and yet 'spiritual bodies' (1 Cor.15:42-44). Our 'hope' is that Christ, by His rising from the dead, hath obtained the power, and is become the pattern of our resurrection (Mic.2:13).²⁰

Not much detail is given in the New Testament regarding the form of our 'spiritual bodies'. Leon Morris sums up what is said thus,

Our Lord's risen body appears to have been in some sense like the natural body and in some sense different. . . It would seem that the risen Lord could conform to the limitations of this physical life or not as He chose, and this may indicate that when we rise we shall have a similar power.²¹

Salmond says that while Paul furnishes us with few answers to the many questions which have arisen regarding the nature of the 'spiritual body' of the believer after the resurrection, he does give us to understand,

'that the new body will be our body, and yet will be different from that of which we have experience, superior to it in incorruptibility, in honour, and in power, in freedom from waste, decay, and death, in the glory of perfection, in ability to discharge its function. . . It is to be related to the former body, and yet is to be different from it and superior to it, as the golden grain with its rich increase is related to the buried seed, yet different from it and superior to it.²²

Strangely, in speaking of Christ's 'body of His glory', the Commentators make no reference to the fact that His post-resurrection body retained the wounds and nail-prints of His crucifixion. It was therefore not 'made perfect'. The question arises, therefore, as to whether this was an accommodation to the disciples' recognition of His identity (with particular reference to Thomas) while He remained on the earth, or whether, as the hymn-writer suggests we shall recognise Him in heaven by these very imperfections. Such a concept seems difficult for a number of reasons. For example, in the visions of the Lamb given to the Seer of Patmos there would appear to be a reference to such distinguishing scars in the figure of 'a lamb as it had been slain' (Rev.5:6). But the lamb is also spoken of within the same verse as having 'seven horns' indicative of great dignity and power, (and that in perfection as indicated by the 'seven') which would suggest a purely figurative representation of the sacrifice and victory of Christ, rather than a description of His actual appearance. Nor would such marks of identification be necessary for One seated upon a throne. Moreover, if the 'body of His glory' retained the scars and blemishes of His earthly sufferings, and we are to be made 'like Him', then, presumably, all the defects and mutilations of our terrestrial bodies would be reproduced in our celestial, and this would scarcely be congruous in the perfect environment of God's presence and glory. Nor would such imperfect reproductions appear to comply with the vision of our celestial bodies as

described by the Apostle in 1 Cor. 15:42-44 or with his declaration that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. . . then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory' (vss.51,53,54).

That the bodies of the saints are restored to perfection in the resurrection is also necessitated by the very nature of the heavenly presence of God himself 'there shall no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie' (Rev.21:27).

Not only, however, does resurrection promise healing from all physical pain, weakness, handicap and disease of mortal life, but also of release from that mental ignorance, blindness, or handicap which is the cause of so much distress, anxiety, fear and despair in the terrestrial sphere. The Apostle Paul could, in the face of all the uncertainties and perplexities of life that baffled human understanding or insight, confidently look forward to a time when all that was dark and mysterious would no longer threaten his peace and happiness. 'We know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. . . For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known (1 Cor.13:9,10,12).

This assurance was the consequence of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking of the power of Christ to work miracles, C. S. Lewis says,

. . it is a possible view that if Man had never fallen all men would have been able to do the like. . . Whatever may have been the powers of unfallen man, it appears that those of redeemed Man will be almost unlimited. Christ, re-ascending from His great dive, is bringing up Human Nature with Him. Where He goes, it goes too. It will be made 'like Him'. If in His miracles He is not acting as the Old Man might have done before his Fall, then He is acting as the New Man, every new man, will do after his redemption.²³

Death, then, has been transformed by the death and resurrection of Christ and the prospect it provides for those whose faith and hope are in Him. For them death is no longer the great destroyer, but rather the great healer. The measure of the transformation that is involved is stated thus by C. S. Lewis,

. . . God is not merely mending, not simply restoring a *status quo*. Redeemed humanity is to be something more glorious than unfallen humanity would have been, more glorious than any unfallen race now is (if at this moment the night sky conceals any such). The greater the sin, the greater the mercy: the deeper the death the brighter the re-birth. And this super-added glory will, with true vicariousness, exalt all creatures and those who have never fallen will thus bless Adam's fall.²⁴

The great hope of the Christian believer lies in that world where the pain, weakness and weariness of earthly sorrow, suffering and sin are past and gone for ever, and perfect health of body, mind and spirit are the undisturbed possession of all who share the life of the Celestial City where flows 'a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life . . . and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations' (Rev.22:1,2).

Body and soul

How then does death and the life beyond relate to the health or sickness of the body? It is clear from the teaching of the Scriptures concerning the nature and effect of resurrection, that the body is an integral part of God's design for man's eternal destiny.

In the Old Testament the general word used for 'flesh' is בָּשָׂר (Gen.2:21). טְבַחָה ('slaughtered food') occurs once (1 Sam.25:11). לֶחֶם ('flesh', 'meat', 'bread') occurs once (Zeph.1:17). And שָׂאֵר ('flesh', 'remains') occurs seven times. בָּשָׂר represents the principal constituent of the body both human (Gen.2:23) and animal (Gen.8:17). From this it becomes flesh eaten

as food (Exod.12:8) or offered in sacrifice (Exod.29:14). It also comes to be used to refer to the whole person (Ps.16:9), thus man and wife are 'one flesh' (Gen.2:24). And it is used to refer to the race of mankind as a whole, 'all flesh' (Ps.145:21).

The New Testament reflects the same uses of 'flesh' as the Old. The general word is σάρξ, but the word κρέας ('flesh' in the sense of 'meat') occurs twice (Rom.14:21; 1 Cor.8:13). In Mt.16:17 σάρξ refers to human nature; in 1 Cor.1:29 it refers to the whole individual or person (Rom.7:18); in 2 Cor.7:5 it refers to the whole body; in 1 Pet.1:24 it refers to mankind as a whole. But in the New Testament it has additional connotations. For example, 'the flesh is said to have in itself 'lusts' and 'desires' (Eph.2:3), and these are said to be in conflict with those of 'the spirit'. That is, the 'flesh' is taken to represent the sinful human nature of fallen man as distinct from the new nature of his 'spirit' as the result of the work of regeneration in Christ effected by the Holy Spirit. Consequently, 'the flesh' represents the seat of man's moral weakness and corruption.

The concept of the 'body' then is, in both Old and New Testaments, an integral part of human personality, morality and destiny. In the Old Testament several words are used for 'body' — בֶּטֶן ('belly'); בָּשָׂר ('flesh'); גִּב and its derivatives ('back'); גְּבֻלָּה ('carcase'); נֶפֶשׁ ('soul'); עֶצֶם ('bone', 'substance'); שָׁאֵר ('flesh'); גִּדָּה ('sheath'). All of these refer to the physical entity in which man resides. No distinction is made in these terms between the physical and spiritual nature of mankind. The words simply refer to his physical nature. In the New Testament, the general word used is σῶμα, the word χρῶς ('frame') occurs once (Acts 19:12).

In the New Testament, by contrast with the Old, clear distinction is made between the 'body' and the 'spirit' (Rom.8:10). And while, as we have seen, the 'body' ('the flesh') is seen as the earthly, corruptible part of man's being, it is nevertheless inseparable from the person as a whole.

righteousness of Christ imputed to it by faith (Rom.4:11). Physical death is the temporary separation of spirit and body; resurrection is their reunion beyond the limitations of time and space. As earthly life requires both body and soul to constitute the whole person, so eternal life equally requires both parts of man's nature and person to be reconstituted. This is the whole burden of Paul's lengthy argument in 1 Cor.15 concerning the nature and necessity of the 'resurrection body'.

The Bible. . . knows nothing of an abstract immortality of the soul, as the schools speak of it; nor is its Redemption a Redemption of the soul only, but of the body as well. It is a Redemption of man in his whole complex personality — body and soul together. It was in the body that Christ rose from the dead; in the body that He ascended to heaven; in the body that He lives and reigns there for evermore. It is His promise that, if He lives, we shall live also (Jn.14:19); and this promise includes a pledge of the resurrection of the body. The truth which underlies this is that death for man is an effect of sin. It did not lie in the Creator's original design for man that he should die, — that these two component parts of his nature, body and soul, should ever be violently disrupted and severed, as death now severs them. Death is an abnormal fact in the history of the race; and Redemption is, among other things, the undoing of this evil, and the restoration of man to his normal completeness as a personal being.²⁵

While therefore, as Paul puts it, 'Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God' (1 Cor.15:50), he is equally adamant that the Kingdom of God is not peopled by 'disembodied spirits'! It is for this very reason that he goes on to describe the transformation or transfiguration that will take place at Christ's return. The bodies of the dead saints will be raised 'incorruptible' and those of the living will be changed into the new likeness of Christ (1 Cor.15:51-53). He speaks not only of the whole creation waiting for the Day of Redemption, but also of the Christian believers waiting for the 'redemption of the body' at the Day of Christ (Rom.8:23). The picture is clear. The body, as now constituted, has by sin been made subject to disease, destruction and death, and as such cannot have any place in the realm of God's holy presence and perfection.

If the child of God is to enter into the eternal presence and Kingdom of God it will require not only the regeneration of his spirit, but also the reconstitution of his body 'without spot and without blemish'.

Thus the hope of the believer lies not merely in the eternal preservation of his spirit from ultimate separation from God in judgment, but also in the reconstitution of his body. The resurrection in Christ is the guarantee not only of spiritual salvation but also of bodily healing and renewal in perfect soundness of form and function. As the institution of the Kingdom of God by the return of Christ will mean the end of the consequences of man's sin in the chaos, conflict and corruption of the created world and its redemption and restoration to the perfection in which it was first appointed by God, so life beyond the resurrection for the believer will mean the end of bodily sickness, pain, affliction and death in the glory and perfection of Christ's immediate fellowship and service. This must involve and will accomplish that perfect healing which is integral to the life of the Kingdom of God (Rev.21:3,4).

Dying well

It is one thing, however, to contemplate the experience of death and its consequences when there is no immediate indication of its proximity. It is another when the sentence of death has been received in the form of a medical diagnosis of an incurable and advancing disease. It is one thing to boast assurance of the glories of heaven while the expectation of continued enjoyment of the good things of earth is still strong. It is another when pain, weakness and fear bring the 'valley of the shadow' nearer by the day. It is particularly useful, therefore, to be able to consider the matter in the light of the experience of one who has put on record in the most honest and lucid terms his own faith and feelings in this very situation.

Rev. David Watson was Vicar of St. Michael-le-Belfry in York before moving to St. Michael's, Chester Square, London. In January, 1983 he was diagnosed as having cancer and died in February, 1984.

His account of his experiences both physical and spiritual during those twelve months is a very moving and remarkable story of faith, courage and Christian triumph which is humbling, challenging and extremely illuminating in many aspects both concerning the Christian concept of death and the often confused and confusing notions and practices of faith-healing. It is all the more interesting and important because David Watson was not only a distinguished and widely travelled preacher and teacher of the Word of God, but also the son of a Christian Scientist, an advocate and practitioner of charismaticism and faith-healing, and a chronic sufferer from asthma.

Not surprisingly then, having received the shock of the original diagnosis, he quickly sought the help of his friend John Wimber, the pastor of a Church in Yorba Linda, California, where amongst the vast congregation and multifarious activities of the Church a notable ministry of faith-healing takes place with miracle cures happening regularly at the normal Services. Wimber's immediate reaction on the telephone was strangely to declare, 'I don't accept this cancer and I believe that God wants to heal you.'²⁶

He also called his whole congregation (three thousand souls) to 'urgent prayer'. After Watson had undergone surgery and it had been established that the cancer had spread to the liver, Wimber and two of his associates flew from California to visit him in hospital. During the visit they engaged in prayer for Watson, laid hands on him, and declared that it might well be that the cancer might continue to spread for a time, but one of them confidently pronounced, 'I believe that the root of it has now been cut. And soon it will begin to die.'²⁷

Watson continued to be prayed for by vast numbers of people around the world and several times was anointed with oil. On one such occasion when visited by Bishop Maurice Maddocks a Communion Service was held in his home and

at the appropriate moment, Maurice anointed me with oil, laying hands upon me and praying for me. . . In many ways it was totally different from the style of John Wimber and his

two friends, and yet both forms of ministries, however different, seemed to bring the healing power of God into our lives.²⁸

When further scans revealed the continuing progress of the cancer the reaction of Wimber was,

We really believe God is healing you. . . We'll go on praying, and if necessary we'll come straight over and pray with you some more.'²⁹

Watson also recalls,

Ever since the initial ministry from John Wimber and others I have welcomed every opportunity of being prayed for, often with hands laid upon me. Almost every night Anne (i.e. his wife) lays her hands on my liver, curses the cancer in the name of Jesus, and prays for healing. . . I have no doubt about the cumulative effect of this 'soaking prayer'.³⁰

His condition continued to decline during the twelve months and at the end of that time began to deteriorate rapidly. He flew to California

for special prayer at John Wimber's Church, since I felt I was losing the battle. . . I was there for only eight days. . . Each day different teams of Christians, experienced in the healing ministry, prayed for me, for periods ranging from two to five hours a day. Yet, for whatever reason, everything seemed to get worse. . . I looked more dead than alive.³¹

We shall later consider many of the perplexing problems raised by the faith-healing aspects of this amazing story. For the moment we are interested only in the reaction of David Watson to the fact and the implications of facing death as a Christian believer. And what an impressive story that is. It is the story of Christian faith and hope growing deeper and surer as the crisis deepened. It is the story of courage and confidence holding fast not only against the onslaught of Satan and the ravages of disease, but also in the face of unwarranted faith-healing claims and pronouncements proving at every turn of the road to be wrong. It is the story of a soul beset by unanswerable questions and unintelligible contradictions yet

buttressed by the certainties of Divine promises that could be trusted and the comfort of an unseen presence that never failed.

Of course there were times of doubt and dismay — every servant of God from the greatest of the patriarchs and prophets to the greatest of the Apostles had them. But there was confidence too. He writes,

I had preached the gospel all over the world with ringing conviction. I had told countless thousands of people that I was not afraid of death since through Christ I had already received God's gift of eternal life. For years I had not doubted these truths at all. But now the most fundamental questions were nagging away insistently especially in those long hours of the night. If I was soon on my way to heaven, how real was heaven? Was it anything more than a beautiful idea? . . . Did God himself really exist at all? . . . How could I be certain of anything apart from cancer and death? . . . But in the middle of these nightmare storms, with waves of doubt and fear lashing all around me, I found that my faith was secure on that immovable rock of Christ.³²

Of course there was the possibility that healing might not be given. When asked in a radio interview, What happens if you find that healing is not coming, he replied,

If I found it was not coming, I hope I have got to the position of really trusting in Christ that the best is yet to be. You know, actually to be with Christ and free for ever from the pain and suffering. . . there is nothing more glorious than that.³³

And even later he could write,

The future officially is bleak, and I am getting used to people looking at me as a dying man under sentence of death. Nothing is certain. I'm not out of the wood yet. Everything is a matter of faith. . . the difficulties are still with me. I am not writing from a position of comparative safety. . . And yet in reality, my position is not fundamentally different from that of anyone else. No one knows what the future holds.³⁴

As the weary months passed he willingly acknowledged, I believe that God is in the process of healing me. Every day I thank him that he is healing me. But, logically speaking, it is possible that I am wrong. God only knows.³⁵

Of course there was the problem of suffering and its place in the purposes of a loving God. Job too had faced that one.

Of course we should always strive to heal the sick and relieve the oppressed; and we should rejoice that in heaven we shall finally be set free from all pains and tears. But suffering can make us more like Christ.³⁶

Referring to Paul's declaration 'For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison' (2 Cor.4:17) and recalling Paul's account of his many and desperate crises of danger, pain and distress in 2 Cor.11:24-27, Watson says,

Once we know the love of God for ourselves and believe in life after death — or life through death — our outlook on this life, with all its pains and sorrows, can be transformed.³⁷

Of course there was the mystery of death and what lies beyond.

Faced with terminal cancer and with the medical prognosis of an early death, I thought carefully about the perpetually puzzling question, 'What happens at death?' When the moment comes — as it will for every one of us sooner or later, whether we think about it or not — what will be the experience of death and what, if anything, lies beyond it? . . . We cannot know exactly what we shall be like after death. The apostle John put it like this: 'It is not yet clear what we shall become. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.' (1 Jn.3:2) That should be sufficient for us. . . When I die it is my firm conviction that I shall be more alive than ever, experiencing the full reality of all that God has prepared for us in Christ. The actual moment of dying is still shrouded in mystery, but as I keep my eyes on Jesus I am not afraid. Jesus

has already been through death for us, and will be with us when we walk through it ourselves.³⁸

These are not the declarations of a terrified man desperate to escape from an ordeal that looms over him in stark panic. Rather they are, in spite of all the things that are not yet plain, the foundation-stones of that peace and confidence with which he can commit the future, both for himself and those whom he loves, into the hands of the One whose company and communion have become his daily and nightly source of rest and hope. Thus he concludes his testimony,

Whatever else is happening to me physically, God is working deeply in my life. His challenge to me can be summed up in three words: 'Seek my face'. I am not now clinging to physical life (though I still believe that God can heal and wants to heal); but I am clinging to the Lord. I am ready to go and to be with Christ for ever. That would be literally heaven. But I'm equally ready to stay, if that is what God wants. 'Father, not my will but yours be done'. In that position of security I have experienced once again his perfect love, a love that casts out all fear.³⁹

David Watson died peacefully a few days later having said to a friend,

I am completely at peace — there is nothing that I want more than to go to heaven. I know how good it is.⁴⁰

'This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' (1 John 5:4).

Destroyer or healer?

What then shall we say of physical death? Is it something to be avoided at all costs? Is it to be feared as the final assault of Satan, or to be eluded for so long as possible by means either natural or supernatural? We have certainly seen that in the theology of mankind's rebellion and redemption it represents both the inevitable consequence of sin; the inescapable judgment of the sinner; and the incomprehensible condescension of the Saviour who 'though he was in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be

equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and . . . became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross' (Phil.2:6-8). And in that sense death was (and is) the last enemy of mankind's eternal glory to be defeated and destroyed by the risen, triumphant and exalted Lord of Heaven. But for the Christian believer death is but the doorway to life more abundant and eternal. Its sting has been drawn; its victory has been upstaged; its threat to the dignity and destiny for which mankind was created by God has been removed; its evil consequences have been reversed; and it is now the very way to Life.

For the unrepentant sinner and unbeliever it is the door that shuts off all that constitutes light and life and love, and therefore must remain the ultimate threat of darkness and doom and the beginning of those eternal woes that can only be visualised in terms of unrelieved anguish and remorse — the great Destroyer. But for the Christian believer it is the portal of that realm where pain and weakness, sorrow and separation, tears and trials are ended and gone for ever. Where all that has been broken is mended; all that has been imperfect is restored; all that has been scarred is healed; all that has been lost is made secure for 'neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord', (Rom.8:38, 39) — the great Healer.

NOTES

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26. David Watson, *Fear No Evil*, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1984), p.25.
27. Ibid. p.57.
28. Ibid. p.90.
29. Ibid. p.99.
30. Ibid. p.109.
31. Ibid. p.170.
32. Ibid. pp.43,45.

33. *Ibid.* p.92.
34. *Ibid.* p.152.
35. *Ibid.* p.107.
36. *Ibid.* p.135.
37. *Ibid.* p.140.
38. *Ibid.* pp.160-168.
39. *Ibid.* p.171.
40. *Ibid.* p.172.

Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1-16*, Doubleday, 1991, pp. 1163.

The appearance of Milgrom's commentary on the first half of Leviticus marks a further step towards the completion of the Anchor Bible. As we have now come to expect, recent volumes in the series are considerably more detailed in their treatment of the biblical material than those which appeared earlier (contrast Milgrom's 1163 pages on 16 chapters of Leviticus with Speiser's 379 pages covering all 50 chapters of Genesis). As a result we have in this volume one of the most detailed and extensive commentaries available on Leviticus.

Since it is difficult to review briefly a work of this nature and extent, we shall limit our comments to two features, one positive, one negative. On the positive side, Milgrom brings to this study considerable expertise and learning. Now in his seventieth year, he assembles in this volume the results of a lifetime's study. Not only does he interact with current scholarly research, but he also refers frequently and helpfully to the often neglected writings of medieval Jewish exegetes, and, in an attempt to understand the rituals of Leviticus against their original background, makes extensive use of material from the ancient Near East. Consequently, few stones are left unturned in Milgrom's attempt to understand the text of Leviticus. Anyone interested in matters 'Levitical' will find a wealth of material in this volume.

On the negative side, it is very apparent that Milgrom's understanding of Leviticus is heavily influenced by his belief that the present text is derived from two main sources P and H, both priestly. Since most of the P material comes in chapters 1-16, this first volume is chiefly a study of P. For a detailed treatment of H we must await volume 2. Although the consensus among critical scholars has been to date P after H, Milgrom argues for the reverse. Furthermore, whereas P is usually understood to have been composed after the D source, Milgrom follows the view of Hurvitz that P antedates D and must therefore have been composed some time before 620 BC. While the arguments concerning the dating of these supposed sources are explored in considerable detail, it is regrettable, in the light of current scepticism regarding the source

analysis of the Pentateuch, that the question of their very existence is not addressed more fully. When the distinction between P and H is discussed, one senses that Milgrom's separation of the two sources depends too much upon circular reasoning or arguments *e silencio*. For example, he argues that H, unlike P, 'refers to the sanctuary by the anthropomorphic expression *miskani* 'my Tabernacle' (p. 37). This conclusion is derived from 15:31 which uses the term *miskani* and is assigned to H. However, 15:31 is the only verse in the whole of ch. 15 not given to P (15:33ab is assigned to another statum P2), and, significantly, the principle reason for assigning 15:31 to H is the presence of the supposed H term *miskani*. Surely Milgrom is guilty here of making the evidence fit the theory, rather than the theory fit the evidence. Would it not be more appropriate to assign 15:31 to P and conclude, *contra* Milgrom, that P used the 'anthropomorphic expression *miskani*? Unfortunately, Milgrom fails to appreciate sufficiently the limitations of source analysis and the pitfalls surrounding its application. While acknowledging 'that the task of separating out the purported stata is hazardous and that the results are, at best, tentative' (p. 61), he allows his perception of how Leviticus was composed to colour too much his interpretation of the text as it now stands.

Although final judgment on Milgrom's treatment of Leviticus must await his second volume, assessed by the general aim of the series, it is clear that although this volume has been 'written with the most exacting standards of scholarship, reflecting the highest technical accomplishment' it is hardly appropriate 'for the general reader with no special formal training in biblical studies'. While academics will undoubtedly welcome this *magnus opus* on Leviticus, the general reader is unlikely to benefit directly from Milgrom's erudition.

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Kenneth E. Bailey, *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15*, St Louis, Concordia Publishing House, 1992. (ISBN 0-570-04563-0.

I had the great privilege of working as a colleague of Dr Bailey for eight years in Beirut, and so, having read with great interest and profit his two important books *Poet and Peasant* and *Through Peasant Eyes* as well as his many articles in various journals and having heard him give many public lectures both in the Middle East and in Ireland, I waited with keen anticipation for his new book, *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15*. I was not disappointed.

In his introductory chapter Dr Bailey sets out with great clarity the methodological presuppositions which have undergirded his work for the past 35 years. They can be set out in 5 main theses:

1. The importance of metaphor in Middle Eastern thinking. 'Middle Eastern creators of meaning do not offer a concept and then illustrate (or choose not to illustrate) with a metaphor or parable. For them the equation is reversed.....The middle Eastern mind creates meaning by the use of simile, metaphor, proverb, parable and dramatic action.' (p. 16) In Biblical thought, therefore, 'the metaphorical language is the *primary* language which creates the meaning set forth in the discourse. The metaphor says *more* than the conceptual frame.' (p. 18).
2. Jesus was a *theologian*. Dr Bailey attacks the popular view that 'Paul was the theologian and Jesus was the supreme ethical example of that theology.' (p. 21). Instead Dr Bailey argues that 'we are left with the picture of a very bright young man who joins the *haberim* (the associates), and after he has spent nearly two decades in serious study, reflection, and debate on the sacred tradition of the past, he is finally ready for his "manifestation to Israel". the theologian is ready to take on his fellow theologians in public and he proceeds to do so.' (p.28) The conclusion of the first two theses is, therefore, that Jesus is a *metaphorical theologian* and his theology has to be taken seriously.
3. The third thesis is that 'any story must be seen from within the culture of the story teller and his/her audience. If we ignore the problem we substitute our own culture for that of the speaker/author.' 9p.28) Dr Bailey argues 'it is my perception that

for us as Westerners the cultural distance "over" to the Middle East is greater than the distance "back" to the first century.' (p. 28f). It is in this context that Dr Bailey is superbly qualified to help. He spent ten years in Egypt as part of a village literacy team and as a preacher and minister. For twenty years he was Professor of New Testament in the Near East School of Theology in Beirut and founded the Institute for Middle Eastern New Testament Studies. He is now Theologian in Residence for the Episcopal Diocese of Cyprus and the Gulf and Research Professor of Middle Eastern New Testament Studies at the Ecumenical Institute for Theological Research (Tantur), Jerusalem. All in all he has spent more than 35 years working and studying in the Middle East. As well he has made a life time study of early Middle Eastern Christian and Jewish literature. Through this vast experience he is uniquely placed both to understand Middle Eastern culture and to pass introduce Western Biblical students to it.

4. The fourth thesis is that there is an important *Middle Eastern* exegetical tradition which must be taken account of in modern exegesis. This includes Syriac and Arabic versions of the New Testament, as well as the commentaries of St. Ephraem, Ibn al-Tayib and Ibn Al-Salibi.

5. The fifth thesis is concerned with form and recension criticism. 'The three parables of Luke 15 can best be attributed to Jesus of Nazareth. I find the setting in 15: 1-3 to be authentic'. Dr Bailey argues this on the basis that Luke would have had at his disposal 'authentic data recalled by eyewitnesses who may have been given the specific task of preserving the Jesus tradition', though he adds that Luke may have been the translator of some of this material from Aramaic/Hebrew into Greek or he may have edited Greek material using his own word choices. This would account for the Lucan vocabulary and constructions in Luke 15. This clearly is a very important thesis and one, in view of recent emphasis on the recensional role of Luke in the parables of Jesus, to which Dr Bailey in the future may well want to devote a complete monograph.

6. The final thesis is one that Dr Bailey has dealt with in detail in his book *Poet and Peasant* and that is that the exegete must pay close attention to the rhetorical structure when looking at a passage.

Having dealt with introductory matters Dr Bailey then gets down to exegesis of Luke 15. It is here that his deep knowledge of Middle Eastern culture and literature, together with many years of work on the chapter bear fruit. One may disagree with him on individual points of exegesis, but one cannot read this part of the book without profiting from the profound insights in it and simply thoroughly enjoying it. This is a book which will set preachers pacing up and down in their studies with excitement and will send students back into their exegetical classes with a new perspective on what exegesis is all about.

J. C. McCullough